



King County Mental Health Chemical Abuse and Dependency Services Division 2002 Briefing Paper

CHEMICAL DEPENDENCY INVOLUNTARY COMMITMENT

BACKGROUND:

Chapter 70.96A RCW is the statutory authority for chemical dependency involuntary commitment. Under this statute, County Designated Involuntary Treatment Specialists may file a petition for involuntary commitment of any individual who is chemically dependent and incapacitated by alcohol or drug addiction, or who has been voluntarily admitted for detoxification or chemical dependency treatment twice in the preceding 12 months, or who is chemically dependent and has threatened or harmed another person and is likely to harm another person unless committed. The court may commit an individual only if an approved treatment program is available and able to provide adequate and appropriate treatment for him or her.

ISSUES/CHALLENGES:

- There are only two involuntary commitment facilities in the state. Individuals needing treatment must wait an average of two months on a wait list before entering treatment. Because courts may not commit anyone unless a treatment bed is available, the long wait for a facility bed means that emergency treatment is virtually non-existent.
- The state does not reimburse counties for the cost of processing involuntary commitment, including the costs for public defenders, prosecutors, court commissioners, judicial administration, witness testimony, court interpretation, and transportation to and from court and the treatment facilities.
- There are no secure detoxification facilities in the state, so that it is extremely difficult to commit anyone who will not agree to cooperate with commitment.
- Pioneer Human Services, the main involuntary treatment facility, does not take patients who have significant medical problems or mental illness, or who refuse to take medications or participate in treatment activities. These exclusionary criteria rule out many of the highest utilizers of public inebriation and emergency room services.

DATA:

- In King County, it takes an average of 50 days from the time of referral until an individual is placed in involuntary chemical dependency treatment.
- In King County, out of 95 commitments in 2001, only one was a contested hearing commitment. Statewide, less than 1% of involuntary commitments are contested in court.

RECOMMENDATION/LEGISLATIVE ACTION:

Lobby for funding from the state to fully cover the costs related to involuntary commitment, and for funding for secure detoxification facilities and enhanced involuntary commitment facilities able to accept treatment resistant and psychiatrically and medically impaired individuals.